



As I stated last month, annual visits to the veterinarian by our feline friends are dramatically down nationwide. Cats visit the vet an average of only 0.7 times per year versus dogs that log in an average of 1.5 visits per year. This series of articles will try to address why our cats should be going in for at least yearly exams and how we can make the trip a little less stressful. Today we try to make the visit more enjoyable.

Most owners complain the hardest part of the visit is the act of getting kitty into that silly carrier. It is not uncommon for our office to get a phone call asking to reschedule an appointment because the cat got one look at the carrier and have disappeared or at least found the one spot under the bed that can't be reached by any direction. Luckily there is an easy answer to this problem, make the carrier part of your décor, at least starting a few days before your scheduled visit. Rather than drag the carrier out of storage (which may make it smell kind of funny anyways) only a few minutes before the visit, bring it out a week before hand. Make it appealing, maybe add one of kitty's favorite blankets into it, and leave it with door open in a spot that she'll have to check it out. Ideally she may even take a few naps in it in the days preceding the trip to the vet's office. Even if that doesn't happen, it won't be as big of a shock when you have readied yourself to placing kitty into it shortly before your appointment time. Some have even found that even after the visit they just make the carrier a permanent part of the cat's world, always allowing for a place for her to get away from the hustle and bustle and have a little kitty alone time.

The next thing to consider is making the inside of the carrier a little more inviting. Some owners have found that adding their cat's favorite treats or some catnip into the carrier helps with a little fun distraction to our feline friends. At our clinic we highly recommend a little spray called Feliway be spritzed into the carrier before you put your pet into it. It is a product that mimics a cat's facial pheromones and usually has a calming affect on most cats. What's great about it is that is truly aromatherapy for your cat – no pills or liquid to give orally. If that doesn't seem to be enough for a very anxious individual cat, you may be able to discuss an oral medication, such as a sedative or an anti-anxiety, to give your cat with your veterinarian. These can have side-effects and some cats will be able to over-ride the effects when they are stressed, only to sleep heavily after they are home and no longer upset. That isn't very helpful at all. Adding some bedding to the carrier often helps your pet get more comfortable during the entire process, but it is a good idea to plan ahead and bring a bag and extra bedding to replace the first batch if your cat has an accident on the way to the vet's office. Finally, I have been told by quite a few owners that what music (or talk show) they have playing on the radio can help their cat relax more in the car ride. I'd recommend starting with something already soothing like Cat Stevens, but maybe your cat is a rocker and really just wants to hear some Pussycat Dolls.

Unfortunately, even with the all the best preparation, some cats still do not enjoy the trip to, at, and home from the veterinarian's office. They cry the entire trip, are upset and hiss

at the veterinary staff and sometimes urinate and/or defecate in their carrier. If that is your cat, be assured you are not alone! Even though this may be an embarrassing or humiliating time for you, rest assured that we at the clinic have pretty much seen it all! Heck, I've even had to wrangle a few ferocious kitties out of their owner's cars from the parking lot! Regardless of your cat's difficulties, you shouldn't put off that all important yearly examination to make sure your furry, purry buddy is doing OK.